MY HAPPY MARRIAGE

1

ORIGINAL CONCEPT
AKUMI AGITOGI
(Fujimi L Bunko/KADOKAWA)

ART
RITO KOHSAKA

CHARACTER DESIGN
TSUKIHO TSUKIOKA

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IT IS A PLEASURE TO MEET YOU.

Chapter 1: Betrothal

MY NAME IS MIYO SAIMORI.

FLIP 1↑

I AM USED TO BEING IGNORED AND NEGLECTED.

NOT ONLY THAT...

1↓ TAP ↓

KTHUNK

I MUST NOT MAKE ANY MISSTEPS.

...I'M IN A NEW PLACE.

WITH A NEW PERSON.

I AM DEEPLY SORRY.

SIGH

I DID NOT ASK FOR AN APOLOGY.

RAISE YOUR HEAD.

HOW LONG DO YOU INTEND TO STAY LIKE THAT?

THERE IS A HINT OF BLUE IN HIS EYES.

HIS ASH BROWN HAIR IS ALMOST TRANSPARENT.

HIS SKIN IS PALE AND UNBLEMISHED, LIKE FINE CHINA.

ALL THAT AND HIS SUBDUED HUES, HIS SLENDER FIGURE...

...MAKE FOR A FRAGILE SORT OF BEAUTY UNUSUAL IN A MAN.

IT IS SAID THAT NO WOMAN HAS REMAINED ENGAGED WITH HIM FOR MORE THAN THREE DAYS.

BUT PEOPLE ARE NOT ALWAYS AS THEY SEEM.

I HAVE NO HOME TO RETURN TO. NO PLACE OR PEOPLE TO RELY ON.

NO MATTER WHAT HARDSHIPS AWAIT ME...

I HAVE NOTHING LEFT.

GRIP

...I HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO STAY HERE.

MY PARENTS' MARRIAGE WAS ONE OF POLITICAL REASONS—

ARRANGED SO THAT THEIR UNIQUE BLOODLINES WOULD REMAIN STRONG.

THE SAIMORI FAMILY IS AN OLD, RENOWNED HOUSEHOLD OF "GIFTED" INDIVIDUALS.

I AM THE ELDEST DAUGHTER.

MY FATHER HAD HIS OWN BELOVED AT THE TIME, BUT COULD NOT GO AGAINST HIS FAMILY'S DEMANDS.

HE SPLIT UP WITH HER AND AGREED TO GET MARRIED.

AND SO I WAS BORN TO A LOVELESS UNION.

I WAS LOVED IN THE BEGIN-NING, OR SO I'M TOLD.

MY MEMORIES OF THE TIME ARE FAINT, BUT I HEARD MY FATHER WAS KIND AND MY MOTHER DOTED ON ME PLENTY.

BUT MY MOTHER EVENTUALLY FELL ILL AND PASSED AWAY.

MY FATHER GOT REMARRIED, THIS TIME TO HIS OLD FLAME, AND EVERYTHING CHANGED.

MY STEPMOTHER HATED ME FOR BEING THE DAUGHTER OF THE WOMAN THAT ONCE TORE HER AND MY FATHER APART.

MY FATHER FELT GUILTY FOR GOING THROUGH WITH HIS FIRST MARRIAGE.

AND I SUPPOSE HE ADORED THE DAUGHTER WITH THE WOMAN HE LOVED MORE.

ONCE MY HALF SISTER WAS BORN, HE STOPPED PAYING ATTENTION TO ME.

MY HALF SISTER, KAYA, IS MUCH PRETTIER AND CLEVERER THAN I AM.

AND NOT ONLY THAT, SHE HAS THE GIFT OF "SPIRIT-SIGHT."

IT DID NOT TAKE VERY LONG FOR KAYA AND HER MOTHER TO START DEMEANING ME.

SPLASH

WHAT IS *THIS?!*

UGH! YOU CAN'T EVEN MAKE GOOD TEA.

DOESN'T THAT EMBARRASS YOU?

IT TRULY IS DISGRACEFUL.

I'M TERRIBLY SORRY.

BREW A FRESH POT, NOW!

HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO DRINK TEA SO BITTER?

I TURNED NINETEEN THIS YEAR.

I'M AT THE IDEAL AGE FOR GIRLS OF GOOD FAMILIES TO BE MARRIED OFF.

IT'S BEEN LIKE THIS FOR YEARS...

I WORK BUT RECEIVE NO PAY, SO I CAN'T EVEN MOVE OUT.

YET I'M TREATED AS LOWLIER THAN A SERVANT. SO, OF COURSE, I'VE RECEIVED NO PROPOSALS.

HMPH

MY MOST SINCERE APOLOGIES.

I KNOW THAT FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE...

...ALL THAT AWAITS ME IS SERVITUDE AND LABOR.

THAT'S BECAUSE OF ALL THE TROUBLE IT'D BE IF I RAN INTO KAYA OR STEP-MOTHER.

THEY WOULD ORDER ME AROUND IF THEY CHANCED UPON ME.

I RARELY DO ANY CLEANING INSIDE THE HOUSE.

SHF

SHF

HELLO.

I THINK THAT'S WHY THE LAUNDRY AND OUTDOOR CLEANING ARE MY TASKS.

THE SERVANTS UNDER-STAND THIS.

KOJI!

THIS IS THE SECOND SON OF THE TATSUISHI FAMILY, ANOTHER OLD GIFTED BLOODLINE LIKE THE SAIMORIS.

HE'S BEEN FRIENDS WITH ME AND KAYA SINCE CHILDHOOD.

HELLO.

YES, IT SHOULD DRY THE LAUNDRY RIGHT UP.

AND HE'S A KIND-HEARTED MAN WHO SEES ME AS A SAIMORI DAUGHTER.

IT'S SUCH A NICE DAY.

AND SO WARM.

AT THE MOMENT, I DON'T HAVE ANYONE I CAN JUST CHAT WITH...

...EXCEPT KOJI.

KOJI...

I'LL TALK TO MY FATHER ABOUT THIS.

HE'S THE ONE AND ONLY PERSON WHO CARES ABOUT ME.

YOU'RE A SAIMORI.

THEY SHOULDN'T BE TREATING YOU LIKE A SERVANT!

HE TOLD ME HIS FATHER SCOLDED HIM HARSHLY FOR THAT.

KOJI!

AS A TATSUISHI, YOU ARE NOT TO MEDDLE IN OTHER FAMILIES' AFFAIRS!

BUT HE'S...

...MY ONLY FRIEND.

IT'S NOT MUCH, BUT...

...THIS IS FOR YOU.

OH RIGHT.

BUT I HEARD THEY DAMAGE EASILY.

I'M SORRY IT'S NOT WESTERN SWEETS. I KNOW THOSE ARE TRENDIER AT THE MOMENT.

OH, —UH—

THAT'S NOT WHAT I...

THANK YOU.

I'LL BE SURE TO SHARE THEM WITH THE SERVANTS.

?

WITH YOUR FATHER.

OH, YEAH.

KIND OF... IMPORTANT BUSINESS.

ARE YOU HERE ON BUSINESS TODAY?

I'LL SEE YOU AROUND.

AND HE'S HERE IN A WESTERN SUIT, NOT HIS TYPICAL TRADITIONAL WEAR.

IT MUST BE VERY IMPOR-TANT BUSINESS.

HE'S GENERALLY A MILD-MANNERED PERSON...

...BUT IT'S UNLIKE HIM TO BE SO VAGUE ABOUT THINGS.

COULD IT BE...

...A PRO-POSAL?

I'M NO DIFFERENT FROM A DAUGHTER OF A POOR COMMONER FAMILY.

KOJI AND I ARE WORLDS APART.

NO...

BUT...

BA-DMP

WHAT?

MIYO?

THE MASTER IS CALLING FOR YOU.

MARRIAGE PROPOSALS AND THE FUTURE OF THIS FAMILY.

LET ME BE CLEAR ABOUT OUR TOPIC TODAY...

MIYO.

I DECIDED YOU SHOULD HEAR THIS, TOO, WHILE YOU'RE HERE.

AND THE ONE WHO WILL BE THE BACKBONE OF THIS FAMILY AS HIS WIFE...

WE WILL BE ADOPTING KOJI INTO OUR FAMILY SO HE MAY CARRY ON OUR NAME.

...IS YOU, KAYA.

I REALIZED A WHILE AGO THAT FATHER WAS THINKING OF ADOPTING KOJI.

AH... I KNEW IT.

GRIP

...HOPED AGAINST HOPE THAT MAYBE...

SO THAT'S WHY I HAD HOPED...

...JUST MAYBE, I MIGHT MARRY KOJI, THE ONLY PERSON I CAN TRUST.

THAT I MIGHT BE ALLOWED TO BE THE MISTRESS OF HOUSE SAIMORI.

THAT KAYA WOULD BE MARRIED OFF, AND WE WOULD NO LONGER BE COMPARED.

THAT FATHER MIGHT SPEAK TO ME LIKE HE USED TO.

HOW FOOLISH OF ME TO THINK ANY OF THAT WOULD HAPPEN.

OF COURSE IT COULD NEVER.

MIYO.

WE ARE SENDING YOU TO BE WED.

YOU ARE GOING TO THE KUDO FAMILY.

TO THE CURRENT HEAD OF THE FAMILY, KIYOKA KUDO.

...

YES.

VERY RENOWNED, WITH PLENTY OF WEALTH AND POWER.

THEY ARE SUCH A HIGH-RANKING FAMILY.

OH! MARRYING INTO THE KUDO FAMILY!

HOW NICE FOR YOU!

THEY SAY THAT SO MANY GIRLS FROM GOOD FAMILIES HAVE BARELY LASTED THREE DAYS BEFORE FLEEING THE BETROTHAL.

BUT LORD KIYOKA KUDO IS KNOWN FOR HIS BRUTAL CRUELTY.

MY EDUCATION FINISHED AFTER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL.

THEY KNOW SOMEONE LIKE ME WILL NOT BE ON THE SAME LEVEL AS LORD KUDO.

AND ONCE I LEAVE THIS HOUSE...

...I WILL LIKELY NEVER BE ALLOWED BACK INTO THE SAIMORI RESIDENCE.

AND NOW I AM TO BE NEXT.

INDEED. REFUSAL IS OUT OF THE QUESTION.

GATHER YOUR THINGS.

ONCE YOU'RE DONE, BE READY TO GO STRAIGHT TO LORD KUDO'S MANOR.

THAT FAMILY IS MUCH TOO GOOD FOR A WORTH-LESS GIRL LIKE YOU.

I HOPE YOU WOULD NOT BE SO *RUDE* AS TO TURN THIS OFFER DOWN.

...TO GO TO THE KUDO FAMILY INSTEAD MEANS ONE OF TWO THINGS.

I THOUGHT I MIGHT FIND A BIT OF PEACE ONCE I FINALLY LEFT THE SAIMORI HOUSEHOLD, BUT...

I'LL EITHER BE SENT AWAY BEFORE LONG.

OR THIS CRUEL AND MERCILESS MAN WILL CUT ME DOWN HIMSELF.

KOJI?

MIYO!

THERE'S NOTHING TO APOLOGIZE FOR, KOJI.

I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT TO SAY RIGHT NOW.

I'M A COWARD.

I COULDN'T DO ANYTHING FOR YOU AFTER ALL.

I'M SORRY.

IT WAS JUST LUCK.

AND MINE HAPPENED TO BE BAD.

IT'S ALL RIGHT.

I DON'T REALLY MIND.

NO!

IT ISN'T LU—

YES, IT IS.

...I'LL FIND HAPPINESS IN MY NEW HOME.

...PER-HAPS...

AFTER ALL...

I HAD NO HOPE OF THAT, OF COURSE.

YET IT SOUNDED LIKE I WAS TRYING TO CONVINCE MYSELF OF IT ANYWAY.

HE WANTS ME TO BLAME HIM AND ACCUSE HIM...

...OF NOT COMING TO MY AID.

YOU DON'T ...

...YOU DON'T HATE ME?

I DON'T HATE YOU.

I HAVE ALREADY PUT ASIDE...

...ANY SORT OF FEELINGS I ONCE HAD.

I'M TRULY SORRY.

I'M SORRY.

I WISH WE COULD HAVE...

...LAUGHED TOGETHER. JUST LIKE OLD TIMES.

I WANTED TO HELP YOU.

MIYO.

I'VE ALWAYS—

KOJI.

WHAT ARE YOU TWO TALKING ABOUT?

OH.

NOTH-ING.

KOJI WAS BORN TO A GOOD FAMILY AND BLESSED WITH BOTH GOOD LOOKS AND THE GIFT.

IF HE HAS ANY SHORT-COMINGS, THIS WOULD BE IT...

WHAT-EVER OPINION HE HAS...

...IT WILL HURT EITHER ME OR KAYA.

HE KNOWS THIS, SO ULTIMATELY, HE SAYS NOTHING.

HE'S A COWARD.

HIS COW-ARDICE STEMS FROM HIS KINDNESS.

EVEN THOUGH HIS KINDNESS HAS NEVER BROUGHT ME TRUE SOLUTIONS TO MY PROBLEMS...

...IT IS TRUE THAT IT HAS COMFORTED ME COUNT-LESS TIMES.

MIYO, I'VE ALWAYS —

I DON'T KNOW WHAT HE WAS GOING TO SAY.

NOR WOULD I WANT TO KNOW NOW.

THANK YOU. FOR EVERY-THING.

KOJI.

I CAN'T SLEEP.

I HAVE MY SERVANT DRESS.

I HAVE EVERYDAY WEAR AND NECESSITIES, HAND-ME-DOWNS FROM THE SERVANTS I WORKED WITH.

I HAVE ONE FINE KIMONO FROM MY FATHER.

HE REALIZED THE SAIMORI REPUTATION WOULD BE DAMAGED IF I ARRIVED AT THE KUDO RESIDENCE IN SHABBY CLOTHING.

SO HE DID KNOW I HAD NO KIMONOS FIT FOR WEARING OUTSIDE THE HOUSE.

HE SIMPLY CHOSE NOT TO REMEDY THAT.

CLENCH

ALL MY MOTHER'S HEIRLOOM KIMONOS...

...AND MY FINE ACCES-SORIES ...

...WERE EITHER THROWN OUT OR KAYA AND MY STEPMOTHER TOOK THEM.

I'VE GATHERED ALL MY THINGS.

SUCH AS THEY ARE.

AND I KNOW NO HAPPINESS AWAITS ME TOMORROW.

ALL I HAVE ARE PAINFUL MEMORIES.

I MUST FALL ASLEEP HOPING ONLY FOR A QUICK END TO MY LIFE WHEN I DO GO.

AND NOTHING MORE.

CHATTR
CHATTR
CHATTR
CHATTR
CHATTR
KA-TUNK
KA-TUNK

Kudo

I HAVE NOTHING LEFT.

I HAVE NO HOME TO RETURN TO. NO PLACE OR PEOPLE TO RELY ON.

NO MATTER WHAT HARDSHIPS AWAIT ME...

IT IS A PLEASURE TO MEET YOU.

MY NAME IS MIYO SAIMORI.

...I HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO STAY HERE.

Chapter 2: The First Breakfast

THEY'RE GONE!

WHY?

GONE!

GONE!!

WHERE DID THEY GO...?

I'M SORRY, YOUNG MISS MIYO.

I'M SO, SO SORRY.

I WENT OUT TO DO THE SHOPPING, AND...

MY MOTHER'S KIMONOS ...

...HER SASHES ...

...HER ACCES-SORIES ...

...HER DRESSING TABLE, HER LIPSTICK— IT'S ALL GONE.

GRIP

I KNOW MY STEP-MOTHER DID THIS.

I'LL BE FINE.

I'M GOING TO TALK TO HER.

SHE WISHES I WAS GONE.

SHE ALWAYS SAYS MY MOTHER WAS A THIEF.

I'LL TELL FATHER IF I HAVE TO.

ALONE? ARE YOU SURE?!

SHE HATES ME.

CREEEAAAK

STEP-MOTHER!

N-NO!!

NOT THE STORE-HOUSE!

B-TOOM

DO NOT SHOW YOUR FACE TO ME UNTIL YOU'VE THOUGHT ABOUT WHAT YOU'VE DONE!

HOW DARE YOU ACCUSE ME OF STEALING, YOU ROTTEN CHILD!

SUCH NERVE FOR THE DAUGHTER OF A HOME-WRECKER THIEF!

SHIVER

SHHHHHHH

HMPH.

WHAT A SAD GIRL YOU ARE.

BANG BANG

LET ME OUT!

SOME-ONE, PLEASE!

BANG

I'M SORRY!

I'M SORRY!

I'M SORRY!

I'M SORRY!

I'M SORRY!

I'M SORRY!

HOOT
HOOT
SNFFF
I DREAMED ABOUT MY CHILD-HOOD...
AT HOME
AH, RIGHT. I MOVED TO THE KUDOS'.
FLAT
THESE COVERS ARE SO NICE
POOF
POOF
POOF

IF I TELL YOU TO LEAVE, THEN YOU LEAVE.

YOU WILL DO EXACTLY AS I SAY UNDER MY ROOF.

IF I TELL YOU TO DIE, THEN YOU DIE.

THAT WASN'T SO VERY ALARMING.

NO DIFFERENT THAN HOW I'VE BEEN TREATED...

OF COURSE.

THE KUDO FAMILY IS THE MOST ILLUSTRIOUS GIFTED FAMILY OF ALL.

BUT THE KUDO FAMILY IS THE MOST NOTABLE, RISING HEAD AND SHOULDERS ABOVE THE REST.

GIFTED FAMILIES HAVE LONG AND STORIED HISTORIES.

ALL OF THEM ARE CONSID-ERED NOBLE FAMILIES.

THEY EVEN OWN SWATHS OF LAND ACROSS THE COUNTRY.

THEY ARE TITLED, AND WEALTHY BEYOND BELIEF.

THE PRESENT HEAD OF THE HOUSE-HOLD IS KIYOKA KUDO, AGE 27.

AFTER GRADUATING FROM THE IMPERIAL UNIVERSITY, HE PASSED THE DIFFICULT OFFICERS EXAM.

HE EVEN COMMANDS HIS OWN UNIT IN THE MILITARY.

HE IS YOUNG, UPSTAND-ING, AND WEALTHY.

I HONESTLY THOUGHT HE WOULD BE LIVING IN LUXURY.

BUT INSTEAD, HE HAS A SIMPLE SECONDARY RESIDENCE ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF TOWN, AWAY FROM THE MAIN HOUSE.

THERE, HE LEADS A QUIET LIFE.

PERHAPS BECAUSE MY BED WAS SO SOFT.

I FEEL WELL AND RESTED.

IS THERE SOMETHING I SHOULD DO?

I WOKE UP AT THE TIME I'D NORMALLY GET UP.

A COMMONER WIFE MIGHT RISE THIS EARLY...

...BUT A WIFE TO LORD KUDO WOULD NOT.

HOOT

HOOT

SHE CERTAINLY WOULDN'T DO HER OWN COOKING, CLEANING, AND LAUNDRY.

I ONCE TOOK LESSONS IN THOSE ARTS, BUT I WAS FORCED TO STOP LONG AGO.

I DON'T REALLY REMEM-BER WHAT I LEARNED, NOR DO I HAVE MUCH USE FOR IT.

WIVES OF WELL-TO-DO FAMILIES LEARN FLOWER ARRANGING AND TEA CEREMONY.

BUT I CAN'T DO ANY OF THAT.

I HAVEN'T HAD MUCH OF AN EDUCATION IN GENERAL, EITHER.

I COULD NEVER BE THE MISTRESS OF THE KUDO FAMILY.

THEN...

...WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO?

BUT THIS IS ALL I CAN DO RIGHT NOW.

I DON'T THINK IT'S SUITABLE FOR THE WIFE OF LORD KUDO TO BE DOING ANY COOKING.

THINK

THINK

THINK

THINK

THINK

AND I WAS NEVER SUITABLE IN THE FIRST PLACE.

BECAUSE I WAS NEITHER A SERVANT NOR A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY...

I WOULD WAIT TO BE FED AT HOME, BUT NO MEAL WOULD EVER COME.

STILL, I DIDN'T EXPECT WHAT I DID IN THE SAIMORI HOUSE-HOLD TO COME IN HANDY.

THINK

THINK

GOOD MORNING, YURIE.

GOOD MORNING.

IS THAT YOU, LADY MIYO?

EVIDENTLY, SHE'S BEEN LIKE A SECOND MOTHER TO KIYOKA EVER SINCE HE WAS YOUNG.

YURIE COMES EVERY DAY TO MIND THE HOUSE.

OH NO.

MAYBE I SHOULDN'T HAVE DONE THIS...

I SHOULD APOLOGIZE INSTEAD FOR MAKING MY FUTURE MISTRESS GO TO SUCH TROUBLE.

I'M SORRY, I'M USING THE KITCHEN WITHOUT YOUR PERMIS-SION...

NON-SENSE, YOU DON'T NEED MY PERMIS-SION.

I'M A WRINKLED OLD WOMAN NOW.

I TRULY APPRECI-ATE YOUR HELP.

LADY MIYO.

!!!

THANK YOU.

OH!

UM...

ONLY IF THAT'S ALL RIGHT.

OH, BUT—

YES!

OF COURSE IT IS.

SHALL I LEAVE YOU TO IT HERE IN THE KITCHEN?

I CAN TAKE CARE OF OTHER THINGS.

NOW! WE HAVE LOTS OF TIME BEFORE THE YOUNG MASTER WAKES UP.

I ASSUME IT'S WHAT SHE CALLED HIM WHEN HE WAS YOUNG.

SHE CALLS LORD KUDO "YOUNG MASTER."

I THOUGHT THE SERVANTS OF A BRUTAL AND CRUEL MASTER WOULD BE LIKE APATHETIC DOLLS.

BUT YURIE IS SO KIND...

...HE PERMITS IT.

MAYBE HE'S NOT AS HARSH AS ALL THAT.

MORN-ING.

BUT...

GOOD MORNING, YOUNG MASTER.

BREAK-FAST IS READY.

YURIE...

PLEASE DON'T CALL ME THAT IN FRONT OF OTHERS.

SULK

TODAY IS SPECIAL.

IT WAS MIYO WHO MADE YOUR BREAKFAST THIS MORNING, YOUNG MASTER.

YES, YES.

YES!

SHE IS A VERY GOOD COOK. I WAS GLAD TO HAVE HER HELP!

IS... THAT SO.

UM...

GASP

GO ON, THEN.

TASTE IT FIRST.

HOW RUDE WOULD IT BE FOR ME TO EAT BEFORE HIM...?

WHAT'S THE MATTER? YOU DON'T WANT TO TASTE IT?

JUMP

I, UM—

HMPH. YOU'VE POISONED IT, HAVEN'T YOU?

WHAT AN OBVIOUS PLOY.

WH—

YOUNG MASTER !!

TRY HARDER NEXT TIME.

I DON'T EAT ANYTHING WITH UNKNOWN CONTENTS.

THROW IT AWAY.

I FAILED.

...FORMED TO HANDLE ANY INCIDENT WITHIN THE EMPIRE RELATING TO THE GROTESQUE.

THIS IS THE MOST UNIQUE UNIT IN THE IMPERIAL ARMY...

THE SPECIAL ANTI-GROTES-QUERIE UNIT.

THE GIFTED COMPRISE A VERY SMALL PERCENTAGE OF THE POPULATION TO BEGIN WITH...

...WHICH MAKES THE UNIT NOT VERY WELL-KNOWN.

ALMOST EVERY MEMBER HAS THE GIFT OF SPIRIT-SIGHT: THE POWER TO SEE GRO-TESQUERIES.

THOSE WITHOUT SPIRIT-SIGHT HAVE THE GIFT OF AN EVEN GREATER SUPERHUMAN POWER.

MAJOR KIYOKA KUDO, COMMANDING OFFICER OF THIS SPECIAL UNIT...

...IS PRESENTLY BURIED IN PAPER-WORK.

AND I KNOW WHY.

I CAN'T FOCUS.

TAP

I DON'T EAT ANYTHING WITH UNKNOWN CONTENTS.

SHE PUT HER HEART AND SOUL INTO PREPARING THAT MEAL FOR YOU.

YOUNG MASTER.

YOU WERE MUCH TOO HARSH ON HER.

WE'VE JUST MET. I HAVE NO REASON TO TRUST HER YET.

NATURALLY, I CANNOT EAT WHAT SHE MAKES.

SHE DOES NOT STRIKE ME AS A GIRL WHO WOULD PUT POISON IN YOUR FOOD.

ESPECIALLY BECAUSE SHE'S A SAIMORI.

I WOULD NOT BE SURPRISED IF THAT FAMILY WAS PLOTTING TO OUST ME AND TAKE MY POSITION.

LADY MIYO IS DIFFERENT FROM ALL THOSE THAT CAME BEFORE.

SOME ATTEMPTED TO CURRY FAVOR WITH ME WHILE ABUSING YURIE BEHIND MY BACK.

SOME SELFISHLY COMPLAINED ABOUT THE FOOD OR DEMANDED TO HAVE A DIFFERENT ROOM.

SOME WENT HOME IN ANGER AFTER SEEING HOW PLAIN MY HOME IS.

I WAS VERY HAPPY MYSELF.

BUT I ALWAYS END THE ENGAGE-MENT BECAUSE I CAN'T TAKE HOW CONCEITED THEY ARE.

IT'S NOT MY PLACE TO TELL THEM THEY CAN'T ACT PROUD AND SELF-IMPORTANT.

I AM AWARE THAT THE HEAD OF A WELL-TO-DO FAMILY WOULD NOT TYPICALLY LIVE IN A PLACE LIKE THIS.

BUT I HAVE HAD ENOUGH OF WOMEN FORCING THEIR OPINIONS ON ME WITHOUT TRYING TO UNDERSTAND THINGS.

I'VE NEVER HAD ANY OF THEM BE SO KIND AS TO HELP WITH MY WORK BEFORE.

IS THAT SO.

SHE'S BACK TO SHOWING NO EMOTION.

I'M OFF.

HAVE A GOOD DAY.

SHE ACTS LIKE A SERVANT.

NO NOBLE DAUGHTER WOULD END UP LIKE THAT UNDER NORMAL CIRCUMSTANCES.

I'LL SEE HOW THINGS GO FOR NOW.

BUT THE SAIMORI GIRL HAS QUITE A LOT GOING FOR HER AS MY POTENTIAL WIFE.

I WAS PLANNING ON KICKING THIS ONE RIGHT OUT TOO.

CREAK

HOOT

HOOT

WELCOME BACK, LORD KUDO.

UM...

IF I MAY?

I'M HOME.

I UNDER-STAND YOUR POSITION.

YOU WOULD NEVER EAT ANYTHING THAT SOMEONE YOU DO NOT TRUST MAKES.

MY DEEPEST APOLOGIES FOR WHAT HAPPENED THIS MORNING.

IT IS OBVIOUS WITH A BIT OF THOUGHT, YET I CROSSED THE LINE.

PLEASE FORGIVE ME.

YURIE MADE EVERY DISH FOR YOUR DINNER.

I HAVE ONLY PLATED AND SERVED IT AS IS.

I SWEAR TO YOU THAT IT IS NOT POISONED.

I JUST PUT MY GUARD UP AND GAVE YOU A WARNING.

I DID NOT TRULY SUSPECT YOU.

NO! NOT AT ALL!

IT WAS ALL MY FAULT.

I WAS ALSO TOO HARSH WITH YOU.

I'M NOT TRYING TO INTIMI-DATE HER.

BUT...

MORE THAN OLD, HER KIMONO IS THREADBARE.

NOW THAT I LOOK AT HER, SHE DOES NOT STRIKE ME AS A NOBLE DAUGHTER AT ALL.

HER NECK AND WRISTS ARE TERRIBLY THIN.

HER FINGERS ARE PALE AND CHAPPED.

HER HAIR IS DULL AND DAMAGED.

I-I...

...UM...

WELL, THEN.

ANY CITY GIRL, EVEN A COMMONER, WOULD PRESENT HERSELF A BIT BETTER THAN HER.

DID YOU ALREADY EAT?

SOMEONE WHO'S EATEN WOULD SIMPLY SAY THEY HAD.

BECAUSE SHE HASN'T, IT MUST MEAN—

IT'S NORMAL TO EAT TOGETHER WITH FAMILY OR THOSE OF SIMILAR STANDING.

OR SO I THOUGHT.

YOU DIDN'T, DID YOU?

WHY DID YOU NOT SERVE A POR-TION FOR YOUR-SELF?

SIGH

I HAVE A GENUINELY ODD GIRL LIVING UNDER MY ROOF.

HE SIGHED AT ME...

I SUPPOSE IT WON'T BE LONG BEFORE HE SENDS ME AWAY.

I WILL HAVE NOWHERE TO GO IF THAT HAPPENS.

I'LL HAVE TO FIND A PLACE TO LIVE AND WORK.

OR MAYBE I'LL—

OH NO, SHE DID!

I...WASN'T HUNGRY.

I TOLD HER I DIDN'T NEED DINNER.

DID YURIE NOT MAKE DINNER FOR YOU?

NOT LOSING MY APPETITE, THAT IS.

BUT BEING FORCED TO GO WITHOUT DINNER... THAT HAS HAPPENED.

NO, NOTHING AS SERIOUS AS THAT.

THIS SIMPLY HAPPENS SOME-TIMES.

NOT HUN-GRY?

ARE YOU ILL?

VERY WELL, THEN.

I WILL GO CHANGE.

MY DEEPEST APOLO-GIES.

IT'S GONE COLD.

YOU APOLO-GIZE WITH EVERY BREATH.

WHY?

BECAUSE I APOLOGIZED ALL THE TIME AT HOME.

AND NOW I APOLOGIZE PURELY OUT OF REFLEX.

THEIR SPITE AND ABUSE WOULD ONLY GROW WORSE IF I DIDN'T.

I HAD TO APOLOGIZE. NO EXCEPTIONS.

IF I CAUGHT MY STEP-MOTHER'S AND HALF SISTER'S ATTENTION AND THEY STARTED IN ON ME?

SO YOU WON'T TELL ME.

EVEN HERE, EVEN NOW, I'M AFRAID.

I'M AFRAID OF MY STEPMOTHER, OF MY HALF SISTER... OF MY FATHER.

I CAN'T TELL HIM THAT.

FREEZE

STOP.

I'M SO—

STOP APOLO-GIZING.

DOING SO TOO MUCH ONLY CHEAPENS THE SENTI-MENT.

AND HIS BEAUTY ONLY SCARES ME FURTHER.

HE NEVER SMILES.

JUST RECALLING HOW COLD HE LOOKED AND SOUNDED THIS MORNING MAKES ME SHIVER.

TO BE HONEST, I'M TERRIFIED.

BUT...

...THEN MAYBE, FOR NOW, HE DOESN'T PLAN ON THROWING ME OUT.

...IF HE CARED ABOUT WHETHER I HAD EATEN...

HE WANTED TO KNOW IF I WAS FEELING ILL.

HE APOLOGIZED TO ME.

DEEP DOWN, THE YOUNG MASTER IS KIND.

I KIND OF UNDERSTAND NOW...

...THAT HE'S MORE THAN HIS COLD EXTERIOR.

THANK YOU FOR THE MEAL.

BUT—

I CAN DO IT.

OH, I—

I'LL DRAW A BATH FOR YOU NOW.

THE BATH HERE USES THE GIFT TO HEAT.

ONLY I CAN START IT WITH EASE.

THE GIFT OF FIRE...

WHAT IS IT?

O-OH, NOTH-ING.

SOMETHING THAT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH ME.

GRIP #1

...THAT I DON'T HAVE THE GIFT.

I DON'T THINK HE KNOWS...

HE PROBABLY THINKS I HAVE THE GIFT OF SPIRIT-SIGHT SIMPLY BECAUSE I'M FROM THE SAIMORI FAMILY.

IT'S UNLIKELY HE HAS MUCH INTEREST IN EVERY SINGLE MARRIAGE CANDIDATE THAT COMES HIS WAY.

I'M NOT FIT FOR HIM.

I'M NOT FIT TO BE THE WIFE OF THE KUDO FAMILY HEAD.

THE KIND OF WIFE HE SHOULD HAVE...

...IS ONE WITH EVERYTHING, LIKE KAYA.

Chapter 4: Strange Fiancée

OF COURSE MY DAUGHTER IS PERFECT.

WHY WOULDN'T SHE BE?

AND YOU, KANOKO, DID VERY WELL BEARING ME SUCH A WONDERFUL DAUGHTER.

GOOD GIRL, KAYA.

YOU HAVE THE GIFT OF SPIRIT-SIGHT.

THAT'S AMAZING.

SHE'S ONLY THREE YEARS OLD.

I HEAR MISS KAYA MANIFESTED THE SPIRIT-SIGHT!

AND THAT'S DESPITE BOTH PARENTS BEING GIFTED.

BUT THEN THERE'S MISS MIYO.

THEY SAY IT'S UNLIKELY SHE'LL MANIFEST THE GIFT AT THIS POINT.

POOR THING. NO TALENT AT ALL.

SLIDE
...

...
NO ONE
WANTS
ME.

AND
THEY'VE
STARTED
TREATING
ME RUDELY.

EVERYONE
IN THE
MANOR
REVERES
KAYA.

I'M
SLOWLY
LOSING
IT ALL.

MY
PLACE.

MY
WORTH.

I JUST WANTED A WARM FAMILY.

EVEN IF I WERE A COMMONER.

EVEN IF WE WERE JUST SCRAPING BY.

HIC

SNF

OVER AND OVER, I WISHED I COULD HAVE BEEN BORN TO A DIFFERENT FAMILY.

YOUNG MISS...

!

BUT I HAVEN'T SEEN HER SINCE MY STEP-MOTHER FIRED HER.

BACK WHEN I GOT LOCKED IN THE STORE-HOUSE...

THE ONLY ONE WHO TOOK CARE OF ME WAS THE SERVANT HANA...

I'VE HAD NIGHTMARES TWO NIGHTS IN A ROW NOW...

GASP

THEY'RE A REMINDER TO NEVER FORGET JUST HOW WORTHLESS I AM, EVEN AFTER LEAVING THE SAIMORI HOUSEHOLD.

I KNOW I'M ORDINARY.

I KNOW I'M USELESS.

I KNOW THAT ALREADY.

ONE OF THE SAIMORI SERVANTS GAVE IT TO ME...

...BECAUSE SHE COULD NO LONGER WEAR IT.

THIS KIMONO IS ALMOST AT THE END OF ITS LIFE.

I'VE REPAIRED IT COUNTLESS TIMES SINCE THEN, AND THE FABRIC IS WEARING THIN.

IT WAS ALREADY IN DIRE SHAPE WHEN SHE GAVE IT TO ME.

I'LL ASK YURIE IF I CAN BORROW A SEWING KIT.

WORSE, I ALREADY LACK CLOTHES. SOON NONE WILL BE SERVICEABLE.

I WON'T HAVE A THING TO WEAR BY THEN.

GOOD MORNING, YURIE.

OH!

GOOD MORNING, LADY MIYO.

カ-KLAK-
カ-KLAK

WHAT WILL YOU DO ABOUT BREAKFAST TODAY?

...I DECIDED TO COME EARLY.

AFTER WHAT HAPPENED YESTERDAY MORNING...

ARE... YOU SURE?

WELL, I...

BE WARNED.

I WILL SHOW YOU NO MERCY IF YOU *DO* POISON MY FOOD.

I DON'T MIND, BUT—

I AM.

I'M SORRY I DIDN'T EAT YOUR BREAKFAST THIS MORNING.

MAKE SOME FOR ME TOMOR-ROW.

NO, I DON'T THINK THAT'S WHAT HE MEANT.

ALL HE HAD TO SAY WAS THAT HE WANTED TO EAT YOUR COOKING.

OH, THAT BOY.

HEE HEE!

NOW THEN, LADY MIYO.

ALLOW ME TO HELP YOU.

O-OH, YES.

THANK YOU.

I'M LEARNING SO MUCH JUST STANDING NEXT TO HER.

YURIE IS SO SKILLED AT WHAT SHE DOES.

I SEE, I SEE.

YES.

I ALWAYS WOKE UP EARLY AT HOME.

BY THE WAY, LADY MIYO, YOU CERTAINLY ARE AN EARLY RISER, AREN'T YOU?

I CAN'T TELL HER I'M MENDING MY KIMONO!

WELL-OFF YOUNG LADIES DO NEEDLEWORK REGULARLY.

I DON'T THINK SHE SUSPECTS ANYTHING.

THERE IS, YES.

I WILL BRING IT TO YOUR ROOM LATER IF YOU'D LIKE TO USE IT.

YES, PLEASE.

AH, YURIE?

IS THERE A SEWING KIT IN THE HOUSE?

GOOD MORNING, LORD KUDO.

MORNING.

IT MAKES ME FEEL SHAMELESS, LIKE I'M GETTING AWAY WITH SOMETHING.

I'M BETROTHED TO SUCH A BEAUTIFUL MAN, EVEN IF IT IS JUST FOR A SHORT WHILE.

YOU BE SURE TO EAT TOO.

O-OKAY.

I WILL TRY YOUR FOOD, THEN.

I-I MEAN, OF COURSE, THANK YOU.

YES, I'M SOR—

HE MUST BE SOMEONE WITH A REFINED PALATE.

MY COOKING IS... ORDINARY.

I'M NOT SURE HE'LL ENJOY IT.

IT'S GOOD.

YOU SEASON THINGS A LITTLE DIFFERENTLY THAN YURIE DOES.

BUT IT'S NOT BAD.

SOMEONE COMPLI-MENTED ME.

SOMEONE RECOGNIZED ME.

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME THAT HAPPENED?

PLIP

WHY ARE YOU CRYING?

TH—

THANK YOU.

WET WITH TEARS, THEY SHIMMER.

HER EYES ARE DARK LIKE OBSIDIAN.

YET EMPTY LIKE GLASS.

MY INTENT WAS TO COMPLI-MENT.

DID SHE NOT LIKE WHAT I SAID?

RUSTLE

PERHAPS COMPARING HER COOKING TO YURIE'S HURT HER FEELINGS.

BUT I MEANT WHAT I SAID WHEN I TOLD HER IT TASTED GOOD.

BUT THIS DIFFERENT FLAVOR WAS EASY TO ADAPT TO, AND I WAS GENUINELY IMPRESSED.

I'VE GROWN UP EATING YURIE'S COOKING. IT'S WHAT I'M USED TO.

I'M SO— SORRY ...

SO... I— I'M— SO—

SO I TOLD HER THAT.

I DIDN'T THINK IT'D MAKE HER CRY.

U-UM ...

I-I'M SORRY ...

...FOR LOSING MY COM-POSURE ...

HER APOLOGIZING TO ME THROUGH TEARS MAKES ME LESS SURE OF WHAT TO DO.

I SAID TO STOP THAT...

I DON'T THINK THAT'S THE REAL REASON HERE.

NO ONE HAS EVER COMPLI-MENTED MY COOKING.

NOT ONCE.

I—

I WAS JUST SO HAPPY...

...I COULDN'T HELP CRYING.

I CAN'T TELL WHAT HER BACKGROUND IS.

WHAT KIND OF HOME DID SHE GROW UP IN? WHO WERE THE ADULTS IN HER LIFE? WHAT EDUCATION DID SHE RECEIVE?

WHAT SORT OF LIFE HAS MIYO SAIMORI LED?

NO. IT'S THAT SHE'S SO DIFFERENT...

...FROM THE OTHER NOBLE GIRLS I'VE MET THAT I CANNOT EVEN PICTURE IT.

IN MOST CASES, IT'S OBVIOUS TO ME WHEN I MEET SOMEONE NEW WHAT SORT OF BACKGROUND THEY'VE COME FROM.

BUT SHE'S A COMPLETE MYSTERY.

TELL ME IF I'M GETTING THE WRONG IMPRESSION HERE.

BUT I HAVE A FEELING THAT SHE WASN'T RAISED AS A NOBLE YOUNG LADY AT ALL.

YURIE.

BUT THAT CRYING FIT OF HERS HAS CONVINCED ME.

I THOUGHT SHE WAS ONLY ACTING HUMBLE TO SECURE HER SPOT AS LADY KUDO.

EVER SINCE YESTER-DAY, I'VE FELT THAT SOME-THING WAS OFF.

SHE WAS GENUINE.

SHE CRIED BECAUSE OF A THOUGHT-LESS COMPLI-MENT.

THOSE TEARS WERE NOT AN ACT.

DIDN'T THINK SO.

DO YOU THINK SHE'LL TELL US IF WE ASK?

I DOUBT IT.

PER-HAPS THAT MAY BE.

YES.

PER-HAPS.

VERY WELL.

YURIE.

I WANT YOU TO SEE WHAT YOU CAN MANAGE TO PICK UP.

I'LL INVESTI-GATE THE SAIMORIS FROM THE OUTSIDE.

I KNOW THAT.

DON'T SAY IT OUT LOUD.

OH, BUT YOUNG MASTER!

IT'S NOT LIKE YOU TO BE SO INTERESTED IN YOUR FIANCÉES!

IT DIDN'T EVEN MATTER TO HER THAT I PRACTICALLY IGNORED HER AFTER SHE INTRODUCED HERSELF.

LOOKING BACK ON IT NOW, SHE BEHAVED STRANGELY DURING OUR FIRST MEETING AS WELL.

I HAD NEVER SEEN OR HEARD OF A NOBLE GIRL WHO WOULD KEEP HER HEAD LOWERED UNTIL TOLD TO STOP.

OF ALL THE BRIDAL CANDIDATES I'VE BEEN THROUGH SO FAR..!

I'LL ADMIT IT:

...SHE IS THE ONE THAT HAS INTER-ESTED ME THE MOST.

...

OH, FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE.

I'M AFRAID YOU'RE GOING TO BE A BACHELOR ALL YOUR LIFE.

NO NEED TO BE SO BASHFUL ABOUT IT.

I AM NOT BEING BASHFUL, NOT IN YOUR SENSE OF THE WORD.

I AM NOT TRYING TO GET TO KNOW HER EITHER.

I DON'T REGRET LETTING ANY OF THEM GO.

BUT I STILL DON'T KNOW WHAT SORT OF PERSON I SHOULD BE MARRYING.

THINKING OF ALL MY OTHER FIANCÉES THAT RAN AWAY...

I WANT TO TELL HER THAT WAS RUDE, BUT...

?

...I HATE THE THOUGHT OF MARRYING A STEREOTYPICAL NOBLE LADY LIKE MY MOTHER.

AT THE VERY LEAST...

IT SEEMS SHE'S TAKEN QUITE THE LIKING TO THE GIRL. IT'S ONLY BEEN THREE DAYS.

THAT'S QUITE THE CON-FIDENT CLAIM.

YOU DO?

YES, I REALLY DO.

YOU KNOW, I THINK SHE'S A FINE CHOICE.

TO BE YOUR WIFE, THAT IS.

THE GIFT RUNS IN THEIR BLOODLINE, JUST LIKE IN MINE.

HAVE A GOOD DAY.

WHAT ARE THE SAIMORIS LIKE AS A FAMILY?

THE ONLY THING I KNOW ABOUT THEM IS THE NAME OF THEIR HEAD.

WHAT SORT OF HOME DID SHE GROW UP IN?

I HOPE I DON'T UN-COVER ANY UNSETTLING TRUTHS.

SIGH

WHETHER OR NOT WE REMAIN BETROTHED...

...I NEED TO LOOK INTO THIS.

SLAM

WE ALREADY HAVE SO FEW GIFTED FAMILIES.

I WOULD HATE FOR THE SITUATION TO WORSEN.

I HAD ASKED ABOUT HER FOR MY ELDEST SON.

WHY DID YOU SEND MIYO TO THE KUDO FAMILY?

YOU KNOW WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT.

WHAT DID WE AGREE ON?

THIS ISN'T...

...WHAT WE AGREED ON BEFORE, SAIMORI.

THAT GOES WITHOUT SAYING.

TATSU-ISHI AND KUDO ...

BETWEEN THOSE TWO, NATURALLY I WOULD CHOOSE KUDO.

AND YET SHE COULD VERY WELL PASS IT ON TO HER OWN CHILD.

BUT MIYO DID NOT INHERIT THE USUBA GIFT.

MIYO'S MOTHER IS FROM THE USUBA FAMILY.

IF THAT—

GRIP

THAT POWER CAN MANIPULATE HUMAN SENTI-MENT.

ANYONE WHO CLAIMS THEY DON'T WANT IT IS A LIAR.

ARE YOU THAT DESPERATE FOR THE USUBA POWER?

...OUR OWN POSITIONS WILL GROW PRECARIOUS.

AND IF HOUSE KUDO GETS ANY STRONGER...

AND WHEN YOU PICK HER UP OFF THE STREETS ...

...SHE WILL SOB WITH JOY.

BECAUSE THAT CERTAINLY WILL NOT GO WELL.

THEN YOU ARE MORE THAN WELCOME TO HER.

ONCE KUDO THROWS HER OUT.

AND HE FAILS TO SEE MIYO'S VALUE.

HE HAS PLACED TOO MUCH IMPORTANCE ON KAYA.

I DON'T LIKE THIS.

TCH

THEN I HOPE HOUSE SAIMORI WON'T MIND...

...STAYING OUT OF WHATEVER HAPPENS TO MIYO IN THE FUTURE?

SHE MAY VERY WELL BE THE ONE TO LAY A LITERAL GOLDEN EGG, YET HE CHASES HER AWAY!

THIS MAN CANNOT BE IN HIS RIGHT MIND!

VERY WELL, THEN.

I HAVE NO INTEREST IN WHERE OR HOW SHE LIVES OR DIES.

NOT AT ALL.

I HAVE ALL BUT DISOWNED HER.

I WILL NOT LET KUDO TAKE HER!

LADY MIYO.

I'VE BROUGHT YOU WHAT WE HAVE FOR SEWING.

ARE YOU SURE IT'S ALL RIGHT TO USE SUCH A BEAUTIFUL SEWING BOX?

Chapter 5: A Contradicting Heart

OF COURSE YOU MAY USE IT.

AH, BUT I'M HAPPY TO ORDER A NEW ONE IF YOU'D LIKE.

THIS IS OLD AND WORN, AND SOME OF THE PARTS MAY BE DIFFICULT TO USE.

OH NO! YOU DON'T HAVE TO.

IF ANYTHING, I'M THE ONE AT FAULT HERE FOR COMING WITH JUST THE CLOTHES ON MY BACK.

I SHOULD HAVE BROUGHT MY OWN SEWING KIT.

HOW SHAMEFUL IT IS THAT I'M SO PENNILESS.

BUT NOW, I CAN MEND MY WORN KIMONO.

THANK YOU SO MUCH.

WHAT IS IT?

IF I MAY... YURIE?

WHO?

THE YOUNG MASTER, ANGRY?

WAS LORD KUDO... ANGRY?

ABOUT THIS MORNING?

I BURST INTO TEARS SO SUDDENLY.

I MUST HAVE MADE HIM UNCOMFORTABLE. I KNOW IT.

MY TEAR-STREAKED FACE MUST HAVE BEEN TOO HIDEOUS FOR HIM TO BEAR.

IF I WERE AS BEAUTIFUL AS MY HALF SISTER...

...THEN ANY MAN WOULD BE HAPPY TO OFFER A COMFORT-ING EMBRACE.

WHENEVER I CRIED, THEY WOULD SCOWL— HOW UGLY, HOW UNSIGHTLY I WAS.

AND SO, BESIDES THE TIMES I WOULD DREAM AND WAKE UP CRYING, I FORGOT HOW TO CRY. AND YET...

I'VE ALWAYS BEEN TOLD THAT MY PRESENCE ALONE WAS UNPLEASANT.

NO, NOT AT ALL!

GOOD-NESS!

IT'S ALL RIGHT TO CRY.

LADY MIYO.

ARE...

...YOU SURE?

THAT WOULD BE MUCH WORSE.

YOU SHOULD NOT HOLD BACK YOUR TEARS.

DO NOT BOTTLE UP YOUR EMOTIONS.

THE YOUNG MASTER WILL NOT BE ANGRY WITH YOU FOR THAT.

FEEL FREE TO LET YOUR TEARS FLOW NATURALLY.

HMM.

IS THAT REALLY TRUE?

THIS IS YURIE, SO IT MUST BE TRUE.

I MUSTN'T GET-THE WRONG IDEA.

BUT I HAVE NO GIFT, NO SPIRIT-SIGHT.

MY FATHER FRIGHTENS ME WITH ALL HIS CONCERN FOR FAMILY HONOR, SO I HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO TELL LORD KUDO THAT YET.

BUT HE WILL FIND OUT ONE DAY, AND I WILL HAVE TO LEAVE.

MY LIFE HERE IS ONLY TEMPORARY.

ARE YOU PREPARING LUNCH?

THEN I SHOULD—

WELL, I'LL BE IN THE KITCHEN.

PLEASE LET ME KNOW IF YOU NEED ANYTHING ELSE.

I REALLY SHOULDN'T BE PRIORITIZING MY OWN NEEDS.

SHUT

OH NO, YOU STAY HERE.

I'LL CALL YOU WHEN IT'S READY.

BUT YURIE HAS GIVEN ME THE TIME...

...SO I MAY AS WELL MEND MY KIMONO NOW.

I'M A GENUINE LEECH LIKE THIS.

WHAT DO YOU DO ALL DAY?

YURIE LENT ME SOME MAGAZINES.

I READ THOSE.

AND I DOUBT HOUSEHOLD CHORES FILL YOUR TIME ENTIRELY.

YURIE GOES BACK TO HER HOME IN THE EVENING.

I DON'T WANT HIM OR YURIE TO HATE ME, SO I'M TRYING TO BE AS HONEST AS POSSIBLE.

BUT I DON'T WANT TO TELL THEM ABOUT MY FAMILY OR MY LIFE UP UNTIL NOW, SO I'M HIDING THAT.

I CAN'T TELL HIM I WAS FIXING MY RIPPED AND WORN KIMONOS.

I WOULD HATE FOR HIM TO THINK I WAS HINTING THAT HE SHOULD BUY ME A NEW ONE.

I'M A HYPOCRITE.

I DON'T WANT TO LIE AND HIDE THINGS FROM THEM.

YET I CAN'T SAY ANYTHING ABOUT MYSELF OR THE SAIMORIS...

I KNOW THERE IS NOTHING ABOUT ME WORTH ACCEPTING.

BUT I DON'T WANT TO BE DISLIKED.

...I'M THINKING ABOUT GOING OUT ON MY NEXT DAY OFF.

I WANTED TO TELL YOU...

AND...

...YOU HAVEN'T GONE INTO TOWN SINCE YOU CAME HERE, CORRECT?

YES.

ALL RIGHT.

WHAT?

WOULD YOU LIKE TO?

I REMINISCED ABOUT MY ONETIME FREEDOM UNTIL SADNESS OVERCAME ME.

I MISSED THE BUSTLE OF THE CITY AT FIRST.

SINCE I GRADUATED ELEMENTARY SCHOOL...

...I SCARCELY LEFT THE SAIMORI MANOR GROUNDS.

WOULD I LIKE TO? I DON'T KNOW.

I'M NOT EVEN SURE WHAT I WOULD DO IN TOWN IF I WERE TO GO.

BUT NOW, I HAVE NO MONEY TO USE FOR MYSELF.

I, UM—

I CAN'T GO.

I AM NO LONGER AT THAT AGE WHEN THE LIFE OF THE CITY BROUGHT ME JOY.

WHY?

YOU ARE NOT A BOTHER, NOR DO YOU NEED A REASON TO GO.

YOU SIMPLY HAVE TO ACCOM-PANY ME.

SIGH

I HAVE NO REASON TO GO.

AND I WOULD ONLY BE A BOTHER IF WE WENT TOGE—

CERTAINLY NOT.

BUT WON'T I GET IN YOUR W—

NO...

YOU MAY WEAR THE OUTFIT YOU WORE ON YOUR FIRST DAY HERE.

DOES ANYTHING ELSE TROUBLE YOU?

IT'S SETTLED, THEN.

THANK YOU FOR THE MEAL.

AFTER HE WAS COURTEOUS ENOUGH TO INVITE ME ALONG AND EVERYTHING.

I HATE HOW I CAN NEVER EXPRESS MYSELF CLEARLY.

I SAID SOMETHING THAT LEFT HIM APPALLED AGAIN.

TO TOWN... TOGETHER ...

I MUSN'T EMBARRASS HIM WHEN WE'RE OUT.

I CAN'T MAKE HIM UNCOMFORTABLE.

I MUST MAKE PREPARATIONS.

MOTHER ...?

WHAT ...?

I

I

WHOOSH

MOTHER ?

I CAN'T HEAR—

AND WHAT EXACTLY AM I WRONG ABOUT, SUMI?

PLEASE WAIT, LORD SHINICHI!

YOU'RE WRONG!

...DOESN'T HAVE THE SPIRIT-SIGHT.

WHAT ELSE IS THERE?

MIYO...

IN A WORLD WHERE THE GIFT WAS OF NO CONCERN TO OUR FAMILY...

...THEN I MAY HAVE LOVED HER.

PLEASE ...

PLEASE DON'T DISMISS OUR CHILD.

I'M SORRY, MIYO.

FORGIVE ME FOR WHAT A DISAPPOINT-MENT I AM.

I AM FAR WORSE.

I HAVE NO POWER AND I ONLY BRING MISFORTUNE TO OTHERS.

#14 SQUEEZE

...MOTHER.

I SHOULD BE APOLO-GIZING...

BUT IT'S ALL RIGHT.

ONCE YOU GROW OLDER—

GASP

HOOT
HOOT

A DREAM ...

WHEN I...

...GROW OLDER?

MY MOTHER...

...WAS BEAUTIFUL.

...WOULD I LOOK LIKE HER?

IF I TOOK PROPER CARE OF MY HAIR...

LADY MIYO? MAY I COME IN?

YES, YOU MAY.

SIGH...

NO, I COULD NEVER.

O-OH...

YOU LOOK LOVELY, LADY MIYO.

BEAM

BEAM

FREEZE

U

D

AREN'T YOU GOING TO WEAR MAKEUP?

U-UMM...

I—

I'M NOT VERY GOOD AT IT...

THEN ALLOW ME TO DO IT FOR YOU!

BUT I DON'T HAVE ANY WITH ME.

...THAT I DON'T REALLY HAVE MUCH OF MY OWN...

SHE MUST HAVE NOTICED BY NOW...

HERE.

I HAVE SOME RIGHT HERE.

THAT'S ALL RIGHT.

YOU'RE FINISHED.

THERE.

OF COURSE. HAVE A GOOD TIME!

THANK YOU SO MUCH, YURIE!

I-I'LL BE RIGHT THERE!

WE SHOULD LEAVE SOON.

SHF

I'M SOR—

I-I MEAN...

THANK YOU FOR WAITING FOR ME.

TODAY IS THE DAY WE GO OUT TOGETHER.

SHALL WE?

APOLOGIES FOR RUSHING YOU.

I DIDN'T WAIT MUCH AT ALL.

YES.

AT LAST.

MAY I ASK WHERE WE'RE GOING TODAY?

U-UM...

Chapter 6: The First Date (Part 1)

?!

ALL RIGHT.

RIGHT, I DIDN'T TELL YOU.

FIRST, WE'RE GOING TO MY WORK-PLACE.

YOUR WORK? DO YOU MEAN...

...THE IMPERIAL ARMY HEAD-QUARTERS?

AM I ALLOWED TO BE THERE?

WE'RE NOT GOING TO HEAD-QUARTERS.

DON'T MAKE THAT FACE.

WHICH MEANS WE ARE HOUSED IN A SMALL FACILITY AWAY FROM HQ.

THE ANTI-GROTESQUE-RIE UNIT, THE ONE UNDER MY COMMAND, IS RATHER UNIQUE.

YES.

BUT SERVICE-MEN WORK IN PLACES BESIDES HQ.

YOU'RE ALL RIGHT. NO NEED TO BE NERVOUS.

YOU SAID WE'RE GOING TO YOUR WORK-PLACE.

RIGHT?

WHAT? BUT...

AUTOMOBILES ARE STILL NEW, SO THERE AREN'T MANY PLACES TO PARK THEM.

AND SO HE'S LEAVING IT AT HIS WORKPLACE.

AND WE'RE ONLY GOING THERE TO PARK THE CAR.

OKAY ...

OH.

I SEE.

WE'RE HERE.

IT LOOKS LIKE A SCHOOL BUILDING.

SHALL WE?

WHOA! COM- MANDER?

I THOUGHT YOU WERE OFF DUTY TODAY, COMMANDER.

OH, GODO.

THAT'S ALL? PHEW.

I'M ONLY PARKING MY CAR HERE.

YOU'RE RIGHT. I AM.

ベル JUMP

4 PEEK ニラ

JUST MAKE SURE YOU COME IN TOMOR-ROW, OKAY?

OF COURSE I WILL. YOU RETURN TO YOUR POST.

IF YOU SAY SO.

UH-HUH.

MY COM-PANY TODAY.

DO NOT INQUIRE FUR-THER.

AND WHO'S THIS?

BYE!

YEAH, YEAH, YESSIR.

NOW, THEN. SHALL WE?

I HATE TO ADMIT IT, THOUGH.

DESPITE HIS ATTITUDE, HE'S A CAPABLE GIFT-USER.

THAT IS GODO, MY AIDE.

MURMUR

MURMUR

I HONESTLY THOUGHT I WAS JUST GOING TO FOLLOW HIS LEAD TODAY.

I DIDN'T THINK HE WOULD BE ASKING WHAT I WANT.

HEH.

O-OH, NO.

NOT THAT I CAN THINK OF.

ANYTHING YOU WANT OR WOULD LIKE TO BUY?

IS THERE ANYWHERE YOU'D LIKE TO GO?

WHAT?

ALL RIGHT!

THEN YOU'LL ACCOMPANY ME ON MY SHOPPING.

I SEE.

I'M ACTING LIKE A COUNTRY TOURIST AND EMBARRASSING HIM...

A COMPANION SHOULD NOT ALLOW THE SURROUNDINGS TO DISTRACT HER AND NEGLECT HER LORD.

I-I'M SORRY! I JUST...

ARE YOU HAVING FUN?

BUT—

SQUEEZE

I WON'T CRITICIZE YOU FOR DOING SO. NO ONE WILL.

YOU HAVE AS MUCH FUN AS YOU LIKE.

THERE'S NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT.

SHF

IT'S ALL RIGHT.

THERE'S NO NEED TO WORRY THAT IT WILL CAUSE ME TROUBLE.

I WAS THE ONE WHO INVITED YOU TO COME, AFTER ALL.

DO YOU UNDER-STAND ME?

YES...

GOOD.

YES, I WILL BE CAREFUL.

BUT DON'T GET LOST BECAUSE YOU'RE LOOKING AROUND.

HE'S WALKING SLOWER TO STAY NEAR ME.

HE'S SO KIND.

WHAT EXACTLY ABOUT HIM IS SO CRUEL AND MERCILESS?

IF ONLY THERE WAS SOMETHING ABOUT ME THAT COULD MAKE ME A MATCH FOR HIM.

THEN I WOULD SURELY, ALWAYS...

...STAY BY HIS SIDE.

KIMAYA TEXTILES

OUR DESTINA-TION.

IT'S SO BIG...

IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU.

WELCOME, LORD KUDO.

MY FAMILY HAVE BEEN REGULARS HERE FOR A VERY LONG TIME.

PLEASE, COME TO THE BACK.

PER YOUR REQUEST...

...I HAVE SELECTED A FEW ITEMS FOR YOU.

MY LORD...

...I'LL LOOK AT THINGS OUT HERE WHILE I WAIT FOR YOU.

AND PLEASE COME THIS WAY, MISS.

FEEL FREE TO BROWSE OUR SELEC-TION.

SIGH...

SOMEDAY HE'LL SEND ME ON MY WAY.

I'D FEEL TERRIBLE IF HE BUYS ME SOMETHING.

I COULD NEVER ASK HIM TO BUY SOMETHING FOR ME.

I CAN TELL AT A GLANCE THAT EVERYTHING IS EXPENSIVE.

YES, DO WHAT YOU LIKE.

TELL ME IF ANYTHING CATCHES YOUR FANCY.

WE'LL BUY IT ON THE WAY OUT.

IT SEEMS THE TIME HAS FINALLY COME FOR YOUNG MASTER KUDO!

HEE HEE.

ISN'T THIS THE FIRST TIME YOU'VE BROUGHT A LADY INTO THE STORE?

OH, THERE'S NO NEED TO BE SHY ABOUT IT.

IT'S NOT REALLY WHAT YOU—

I SAW LADY MIYO MENDING ONE OF HER WORN KIMONOS HERSELF.

THAT IS TRUE, BUT...

I WAS GOING TO STOP HER.

BUT I DON'T THINK SHE WANTS US TO KNOW...

NO.

SHE'S NOT SPECIAL.

I NEVER FELT THE NEED TO BUY THINGS FOR ANY OF MY PREVIOUS FIANCÉES.

BUT SHE—

I SEE.

HER CLOTHES ARE WORSE OFF THAN A PEASANT'S.

THEY ARE COLORFUL AND VARIED, BUT THEY'RE ALL WORN. IT PAINS ME.

DID YOU FIND SOMETHING THAT MIGHT SUIT HER?

SO?

HMM.

LIGHTER COLORS ARE INDEED FITTING FOR THE SEASON.

I THINK A LIGHTER COLOR LIKE THIS WOULD SUIT HER PERFECTLY.

OH HO, I DID.

WHAT ABOUT THAT ONE?

THAT'S NICE TOO.

BUT THAT WOULD BE OUT OF SEASON BY THE TIME THE TAILORING IS FINISHED.

IT'S A BEAUTIFUL CHERRY BLOSSOM PINK.

THE PALE BUT STRIKING COLOR IMMEDIATELY DRAWS THE EYE.

I THINK IT WOULD LOOK GOOD ON HER.

MY LORD.

NO, I'M DISGUSTED WITH MYSELF FOR HAVING THE IMAGE IN THE FIRST PLACE.

SHE WOULD BE DISGUSTED TO KNOW I PICTURED HER IN THAT WAY.

SIGH

SHE'S NOT SPECIAL.

SHE'S NOT.

WHAT AM I DOING?!

OH? ARE YOU SURE?

I WANT A KIMONO MADE IN THAT PINK.

AND CAN YOU MAKE SEVERAL WITH THESE FABRICS?

CERTAINLY.

NEXT SPRING ...

MY!

IT'S FINE.

SHE CAN WEAR IT NEXT SPRING.

LORD KUDO?

WHAT IS IT?

I WILL.

AH, THANK YOU.

YOU MAY TAKE THIS HOME WITH YOU TODAY.

OH YES.

LOOM

YOU DO NOT, UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES, LET THAT GIRL GO!

LISTEN TO ME!

WHAT?

SHE IS A GEM IN THE ROUGH.

SHE SHOWS BOUNDLESS PROMISE!

HER HAIR, HER SKIN, HER FACE—ALL OF IT!

POLISH HER AND SHE WILL POSSESS A BEAUTY THAT RIVALS YOUR OWN.

YOU NEED TO KEEP POLISHING HER WITH YOUR LOVE AND FINANCIAL MEANS.

WHEN YOU DO...

WHAT YOU'VE PURCHASED TODAY IS ONLY THE BEGINNING.

THAT'S WHAT SHE REALLY WANTED TO TELL ME.

AND YOU SHOULD COME BACK AND SHOP HERE!

SIGH

YOU WILL UNDERSTAND THE JOY OF DRESSING A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN UP.

WHEN I DO...?

WHAT AM I THINKING?

SHAKE

WAIT.

SHAKE

SHAKE

BUT THAT'S NOT A TERRIBLE IDEA.

I SHOULD HAVE SAID...

...THAT LOVE HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH IT.

WHAT IS SHE LOOKING AT...?

THAT'S THE CHERRY BLOSSOM CLOTH—

MOTHER ...

DO YOU LIKE THAT ONE?

IT'S JUST...

...THE SAME COLOR AS ONE IN MY MOTHER'S COLLEC-TION...

OH. I DON'T HAVE IT ANYMORE, THOUGH.

I, UM, IT'S NOT THAT I WANT IT.

O-OH, MY LORD!

I SAW IT AND IT JUST...

...REMINDED ME OF HER.

DID ANYTHING ELSE CATCH YOUR EYE?

N-NO!

I HAVE ENOUGH FOR NOW.

SO...

I SEE.

SHE ALWAYS, ALWAYS REFUSES.

AND FOR THAT REASON, I DIDN'T TELL HER WHY WE CAME HERE TODAY.

KIMAYA TEXTILES

SHE NEVER ASKS FOR ANYTHING HERSELF.

IF I DID, I JUST KNOW SHE WOULD FEEL GUILTY.

I CAN IMAGINE THAT PAINED, DEATHLY LOOK ON HER FACE.

LOOKS LIKE MY JUDGMENT WAS CORRECT.

HEH

I LOOK FORWARD TO YOUR NEXT VISIT.

YES.

SHALL WE GO, THEN?

Chapter 7: The First Date (Part 2)

DESSIN

IT'S DELICIOUSLY SWEET.

Y-YES.

DO YOU LIKE IT?

...PEOPLE ARE STARING AT US...!

BUT...

BUT I UNDER-STAND WHY.

HE ATTRACTS SO MUCH ATTENTION JUST WALKING AROUND TOWN.

KIYOKA KUDO IS A MAN OF UNRIVALED BEAUTY.

HIS HAIR IS AS FINE AS ANY WOMAN'S.

EVERY MOVEMENT IS ELEGANT, DELIBERATE, AND SO EYE-CATCHING.

IT'S THE YOUNGER GIRLS WHO GIVE ME THE DIRTIEST LOOKS.

BUT...

GLANCE 4 ⇒ 7

I'M JUST HIS COMPANION FOR THE DAY...

I KNOW THEY'RE THINKING IT.

"WHY IS A GIRL LIKE HER WITH SOMEONE LIKE HIM?"

...GROW QUIET AND FADE AWAY.

...OR EVEN SULLEN HE TYPICALLY LOOKS.

IT'S EVEN MORE NOTICEABLE CONSIDERING HOW EXPRESSIONLESS...

...HE APPEARS TO BE IN, ALL THOSE SILLY THOUGHTS...

BUT WHEN I SEE WHAT A GOOD MOOD...

OH!

THAT'S NOT TRUE AT ALL.

YOUR FACE DOESN'T TELL ME YOU THINK IT TASTES GOOD.

BA-THUMP

YOU REALLY NEVER SMILE, DO YOU?

SIGH

NO, I'M NOT CRITICIZING YOU.

I'M SORRY.

I SIMPLY ...

...WOULD LIKE TO SEE WHAT YOU LOOK LIKE WITH A SMILE.

CALL IT CURIOSITY.

...

YOU'RE QUITE, UM...

...A STRANGE ONE, AREN'T YOU?

THIS IS WHY I DON'T DESERVE ANY OF THIS...

GOING OUT AND SEEING SO MANY THINGS FOR THE FIRST TIME IN A LONG TIME HAS MADE ME FLIPPANT.

I'M HORRIBLE.

GASP!

OH!

I-I'M SO SORRY!

HOW IMPUDENT OF ME!

HOW COULD I TELL THE LORD OF THE HOUSE THAT HE'S STRANGE? HOW RUDE OF ME!

DESPITE HOW AWFUL SHE'S BEEN TO ME...

...SHE IS CLEVER AND WOULD NEVER INSULT ANOTHER.

KAYA WOULD HAVE NEVER MADE SUCH A MISTAKE.

LOOK AT ME.

TAP

IF ALL GOES WELL, THEN WE ARE TO MARRY.

IT WOULD BE BEST IF WE ARE ABLE TO SPEAK OUR MINDS TO ONE ANOTHER.

NO NEED TO COWER LIKE THAT.

I'M NOT ANGRY.

WE ARE...

...TO MARRY...

I MUST CON-FESS...

...I AM MUCH HAPPIER WHEN YOU ARE HONEST WITH ME, AS YOU JUST WERE.

YOU NEED NOT APOLOGIZE.

THAT HARDLY MAKES ME SUITED TO BE A KUDO WIFE.

HE DOESN'T KNOW I DON'T HAVE A FULL EDUCATION, MUCH LESS THE GIFT.

HE DOESN'T KNOW.

WE SAW SO MANY NICE THINGS IN TOWN.

WE HAD A LOVELY TEATIME TOGETHER.

HE GAVE ME SO MUCH TODAY.

HE TOLD ME HE WANTS ME TO BE HONEST WITH HIM, NOT APOLOGIZE.

AND THAT ALL MADE ME SO, SO HAPPY.

BUT...

IF I FEEL GRATEFUL TO HIM...

...AND IF I CARE FOR HIM...

...THEN, EVEN IF HE'LL HATE ME FOR IT...

...I NEED TO TELL HIM I'M NOT SUITED TO BE HIS WIFE. RIGHT NOW.

...I FEEL A BUDDING WISH IN ME.

A WISH TO STAY WITH HIM...

...FOR A LONG TIME TO COME.

I WILL TAKE WHATEVER PUNISHMENT AWAITS ME.

A SQUEEZE

SO LET ME...

I...

...UNDER-STAND.

I WILL BE MORE HONEST WITH YOU.

LET ME HAVE THIS JUST FOR NOW.

GOOD.

AFTER I BASK IN THIS HAPPINESS FOR JUST A LITTLE LONGER...

WHOOSHHH

...I'LL TELL HIM THE TRUTH.

SHE IS EVER RELUCTANT TO ACCEPT ANYTHING.

TAP

THEREFORE, IF I PLACE THIS OUTSIDE HER ROOM, SHE WILL HAVE TO TAKE IT.

THMP

THMP

THMP

THERE.

LET'S FIND OUT WHAT SHE'LL SAY.

THIS...

M—

MY LORD!!

IT'S YOURS.

DID YOU DO THIS?

IT WAS OUTSIDE OF MY ROOM.

MM.

WHY SHOULD THAT BOTHER YOU?

THE FINENESS OF A COMB CORRELATES TO THE QUALITY OF ONE'S HAIR.

I CAN'T TAKE SOMETHING SO VALUABLE.

BUT A MAN GIFTING A WOMAN A COMB IS EQUIVALENT TO ASKING HER HAND IN MARRIAGE.

...YOU PUT IT OUT-SIDE MY ROOM.

DIDN'T YOU?

UM...

BE-CAUSE —

DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT.

...

THAT'S WHY I'VE HAD TO GIVE IT TO HER DISCREETLY TO AVOID MISUNDER-STANDINGS.

AS SHE IS NOW...

...THIS IS THE BEST GIFT FOR HER. IT'S PRACTICAL.

THEN ...

...I'LL DO JUST THAT.

MY LORD?

DON'T READ TOO DEEPLY INTO IT.

JUST USE IT AS YOU LIKE.

I'LL USE IT WITH GREAT CARE.

GOOD.

NO. IF I HAD TO NAME IT, IT WOULD BE...

WONDER?

EXCITEMENT, PERHAPS?

JOY?

IS THERE A NAME FOR THIS FEELING?

THANK YOU SO MUCH, MY LORD.

...AFFECTION.

10-FLIP

Regarding Miyo Saimori

ANTI-GRO-TES-QUERIE UNIT HQ

SO IT SEEMS LIKE MIYO WAS ABUSED.

HER STEP-MOTHER'S DAUGHTER HAD THE GIFT.

WITHIN GIFTED FAMILIES...

...THERE IS A CLEAR DIVIDE IN TREATMENT BETWEEN THOSE WHO HAVE IT AND THOSE WHO DON'T.

IT HAPPENS MORE OFTEN THAN YOU THINK, YOU KNOW.

IT EXPLAINS WHY SHE COOKS, CLEANS, AND DOES THE LAUNDRY AND SEWING.

SHE WAS TREATED LIKE A SERVANT. SHE WAS NEVER EVEN PROPERLY FED.

THE STEP-MOTHER AND HALF SISTER ABUSED MIYO SAIMORI.

HER FATHER PRE-TENDED NOT TO NOTICE.

THE SERVANTS ONLY WATCHED.

THE TRUTH OF THE SAIMORI HOUSE-HOLD IS HORRIBLE.

HER EMACIATED PHYSIQUE ...

...HER OLD, WORN CLOTHES ...

...ALL STEM FROM HER FAMILY.

...AND HER INABILITY TO SMILE...

I DIDN'T KNOW THEN, BUT I STILL REGRET WHAT I DID.

I, TOO...

...HAVE BEEN UNDULY HARSH IN MY WORDS TO HER.

BUT NOW I KNOW.

CRNKL

MIYO SAIMORI HAS NO GIFT.

NOT EVEN THE GIFT OF SPIRIT-SIGHT.

BUT NOT ALL WHO WERE BETROTHED TO ME HAD THE GIFT.

SHE REFUSES TO TAKE ME UP ON MY KINDNESS BECAUSE SHE THINKS SHE'LL ONE DAY LEAVE.

SHE LIKELY THINKS THIS MARRIAGE WILL NOT COME TO PASS.

YET TO THINK THAT HER MOTHER WAS OF THE USUBA FAMILY...

CREAK

THROUGH-OUT HISTORY, THE POWER HAS BEEN PRIZED...

...AS IT CAN KEEP THE PEACE...

...AND SUPPRESS CONFLICT.

GIFTED FAMILIES HAVE LONG SERVED UNDER THE EMPEROR.

THE GIFT IS CRUCIAL IN SUBDUING GROTESQUE-RIES— REGULAR PEOPLE CANNOT SEE THEM.

WALK-ING IN MIDAIR.

TRANS-PORTING ONESELF TO A DISTANT PLACE IN AN INSTANT.

MOVING THINGS WITH THOUGHT ALONE.

GIFTS COME IN ALL FORMS.

SEEING THROUGH WALLS.

CREATING FIRE AND MANIPU-LATING WIND AND WATER.

...GIVES THEM CONTROL OVER OTHERS' THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS.

BECAUSE THEIR POWER...

BUT THE USUBA GIFT IS FAR MORE UNIQUE. AND DANGEROUS.

READING MINDS.

MANIPU-LATING MEMO-RIES.

ENTER-ING DREAMS.

THOSE ARE ON THE LOWER END AS FAR AS DANGER GOES.

BUT SOME COULD ERASE A PERSON'S SELF AND TURN THEM INTO A PUPPET.

OR CON-FOUND OTHERS WITH HAL-LUCINA-TIONS.

THOSE ABILITIES WERE FRIGHT-ENING.

...THAN ANY GIFT SUITED FOR COMBAT.

DEPEND-ING ON THE GIFT-USER, IT COULD BE MUCH MORE DAMAGING TO THE COUNTRY...

THE USUBAS UNDERSTOOD THE DANGER THEIR POWER HELD.

THEY HIDE AWAY AND LIVE QUIETLY.

BECAUSE OF THIS, THE USUBAS NEVER TAKE PUBLIC ROLES.

MIYO'S MOTHER, SUMI USUBA...

...REPRE-SENTED AN EXTREMELY UNUSUAL CASE WHEN SHE MARRIED INTO THE SAIMORI FAMILY.

THEY'RE SAID TO OCCASION-ALLY TURN DOWN IMPERIAL ORDERS TOO.

THEY HAVE THEIR OWN CUSTOMS THAT RESTRICT THEIR ACTIONS.

THEY ARE WARY OF WORD OF THEIR POWER GETTING OUT.

AND THEY RARELY MIX THEIR BLOOD WITH OTHERS.

SIGH

AND THAT'S WHAT BOTHERS ME.

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

EVEN WITH MY FAMILY'S TIES, I HAVE NO IDEA HOW TO GET INTO CONTACT WITH THEM.

ASKING AN INFORMANT WOULD LIKELY BE A WASTED EFFORT TOO.

THERE IS NO ISSUE WITH TAKING MIYO SAIMORI AS A BRIDE.

BUT THE USUBAS ARE SO SHROUDED IN MYSTERY THAT IT'S UNNERVING.

I'VE BEEN COMING HOME EARLIER THAN USUAL LATELY, HAVEN'T I?

I ENDED LATE TODAY.

GOOD NIGHT, SIR.

I GET HOME SO I HAVE TIME TO EAT WITH HER.

I FEEL AT EASE WHEN SHE GREETS ME AT THE DOOR.

WEL-COME BACK.

THIS REALLY ISN'T LIKE ME.

I WAS TIRED OF ALL THE FEMININE ATTENTION I RECEIVED THROUGHOUT MY LIFE.

I'VE NEVER FOUND IT EASY DEALING WITH WOMEN.

I PARTICULARLY HATED MY HOT-TEMPERED MOTHER...

...WHO ADORED LUXURY AND GAUDY FASHION.

...BUT IT ONLY HEIGHTENED MY AVERSION TO WOMEN.

AND SO I PLAYED AT COURTSHIP WITH SOME...

THE UPPERCLASSMEN AT MY UNIVERSITY BADGERED ME ABOUT PURSUING GIRLS.

TO THINK I NOW LIVE WITH A WOMAN OF MARRIAGEABLE AGE OF MY OWN WILL...

KLAK KLAK

DESPITE THE DISTANCE I KEPT, THE MANY FEMALE SERVANTS IN THE MAIN HOUSE KEPT MAKING EYES AT ME.

I WAS NEVER AT EASE BECAUSE OF IT, SO I MOVED TO THAT SMALL HOUSE.

UP UNTIL NOW, I'VE BRUSHED EVERYONE OFF WITH A POLITE SMILE.

KLAK

SOME-
THING'S...

WOOM

...FOLLOWING
ME.

FWP

BUT THAT IS TO CREATE A PLACE FOR BATTLES AWAY FROM PRYING EYES.

THERE'S NO BARRIER AROUND THE BASE.

NOR DO THE GUARDS POSSESS SPIRIT-SIGHT.

I HEAR NO FOOT-STEPS OR BREATHING.

IT'S NOT A LIVING PERSON.

KSH

KSH

KSH

KSH

I SUPPOSE ASKING WHO SENT YOU WILL NOT GIVE ME ANSWERS.

BIRD FAMILIARS.

SHF

A FOOLISH ENDEAVOR.

FWOOM

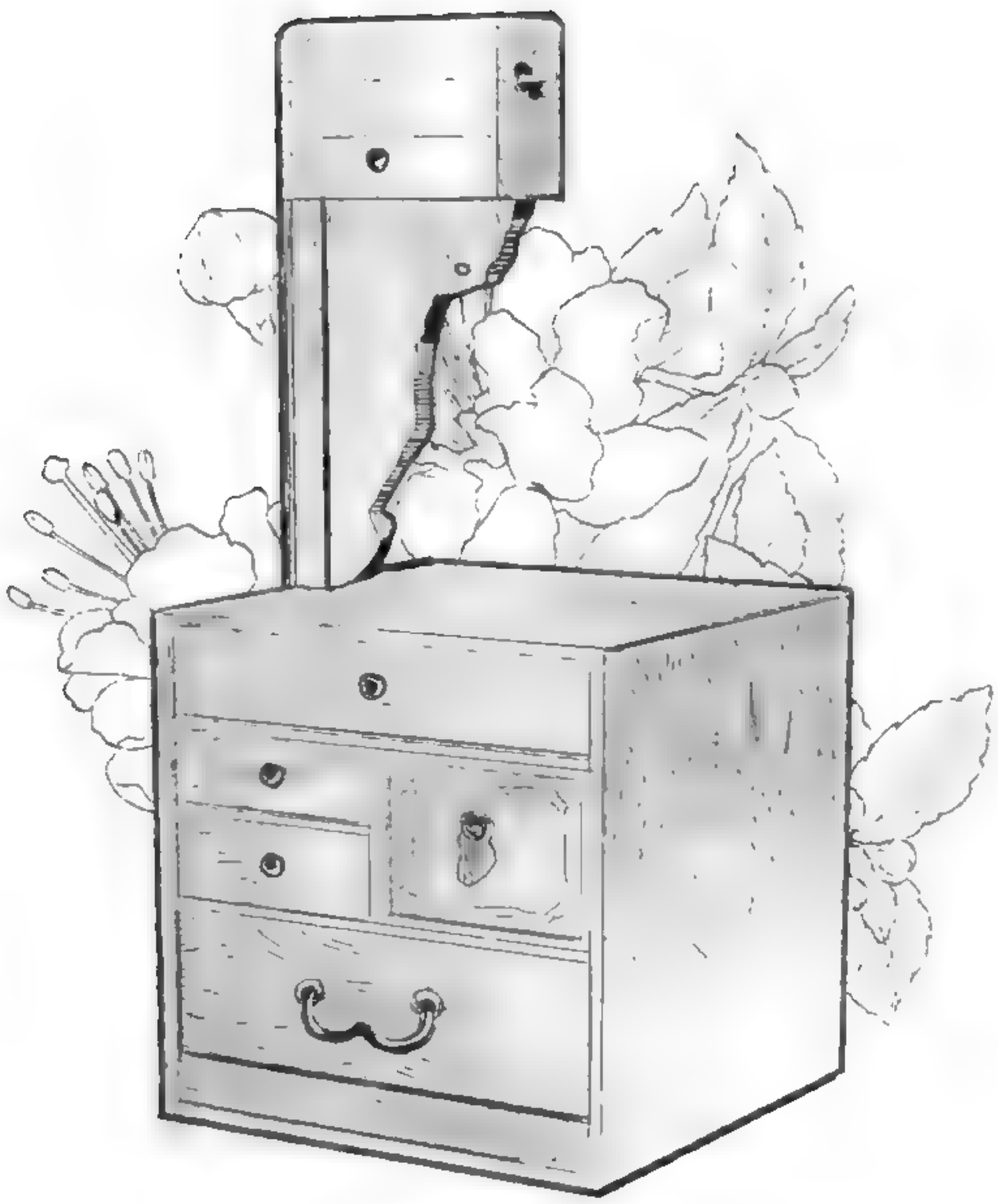
FLIT

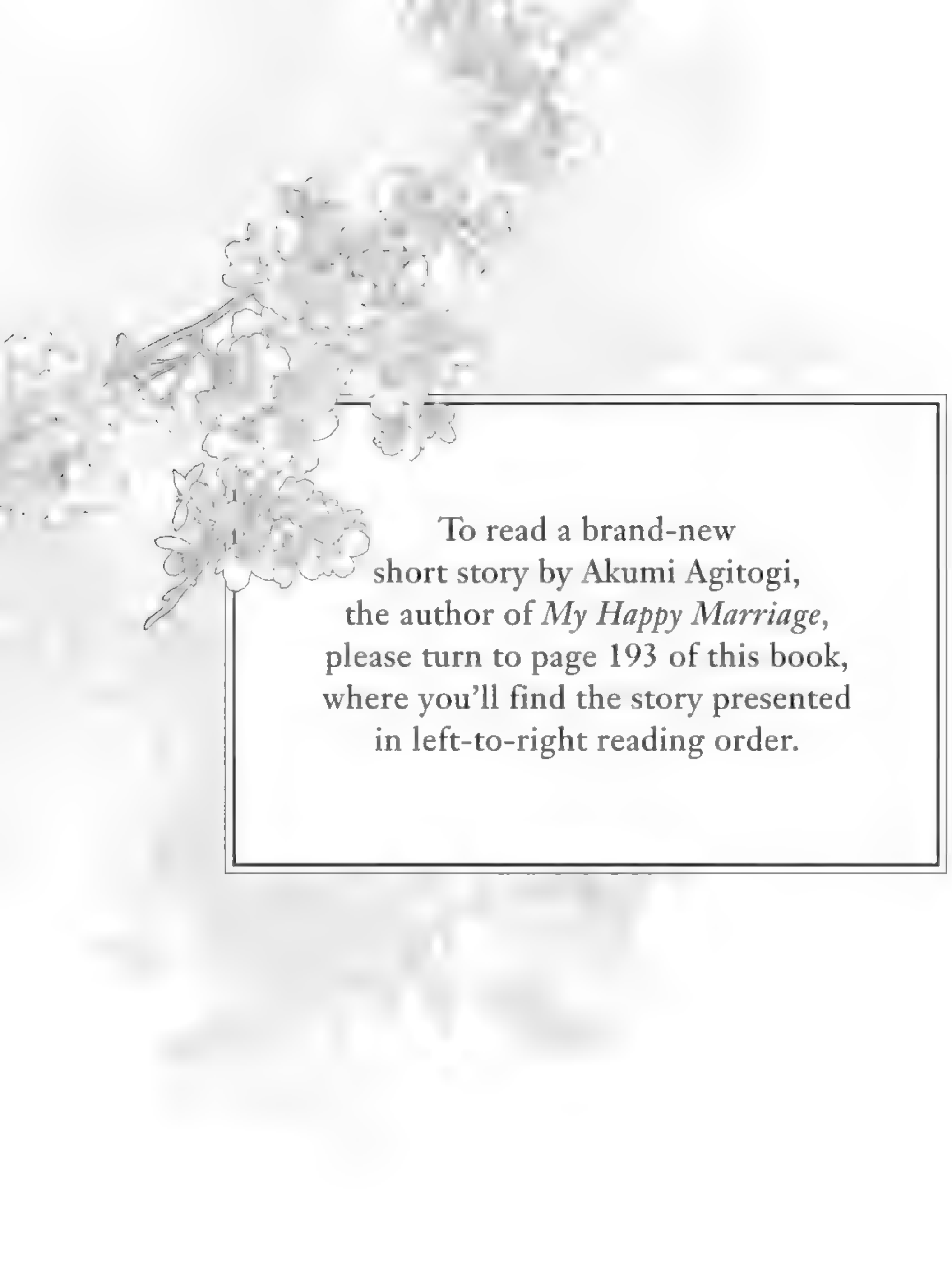
FLIT

IT WAS NOT IMPRESSIVE WORK.

BUT SOMEONE STILL DID THIS...

My Happy Marriage, Vol. 1 • END





To read a brand-new
short story by Akumi Agitogi,
the author of *My Happy Marriage*,
please turn to page 193 of this book,
where you'll find the story presented
in left-to-right reading order.

Miyo's heart had grown so much freer and lighter since then, and she broke into a smile quite naturally.

I never asked her name…

Miyo wondered how they were doing—both the servant who gave her the comb and the servant Hana who always supported her. She wished only happiness for the people who had brought her warmth in such a cold household.

All she could do now was remember them and pray for them.

Of the two combs, the old one was of no use anymore, but she knew in her heart that she would always keep it with her.

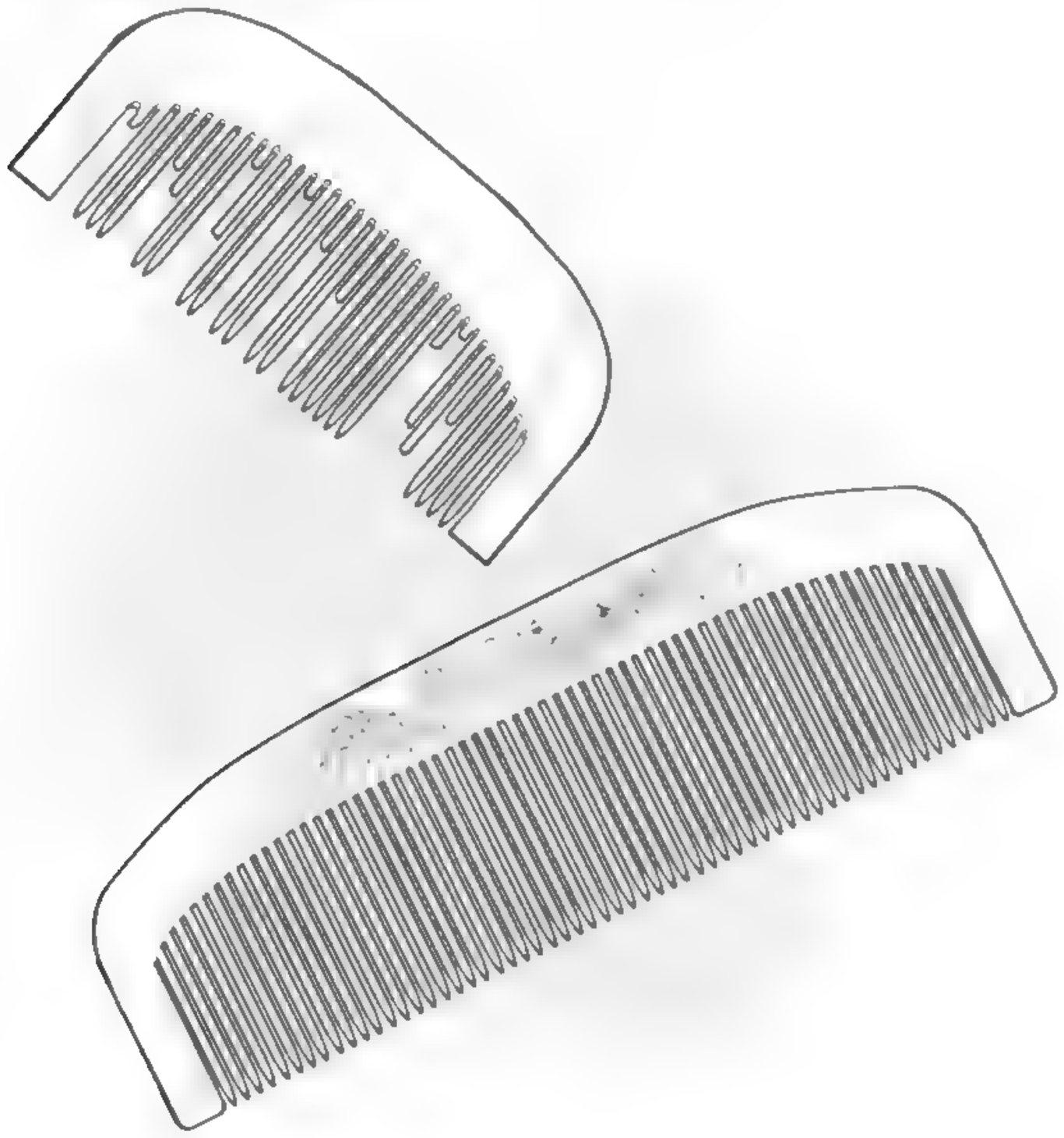
"It's yours."

"Don't read too deeply into it. Just use it as you like."

Combs always brought kindness with them.

Miyo recalled how flustered Kiyoka seemed when he gave her this new comb. She placed her two combs in a drawer and crawled under the covers of her futon.

She had a feeling deep down that she would soon have another warm memory to cherish.



that you treated and bandaged my arm… And that made me happy, so…"

Miyo spoke in a halting and hesitant manner, unused to such long sentences. She lifted her gaze to see if her sentiment got across and found silent tears spilling from the girl's eyes.

"Thank you… I'm sorry," sniffled the girl, standing there crying for a little while. Waves of different emotions washed over Miyo's heart as she watched.

It didn't feel like the girl had taken advantage of Miyo merely to make herself feel better. Miyo was simply glad to experience the artless kindness of another, and she couldn't bear the knowledge that she had caused such a sweet person anguish over her existence. Still, she could feel the sting of Kanoko's cruel words fading already.

"You should have this, Miss Miyo," said the girl as they parted, handing Miyo a practically brand-new comb.

"But this is—"

"Your comb broke, right? This one's nothing fancy and has a broken tooth at the end. Still, you should have it."

"But—"

This comb would last her a long time. Miyo took it from the servant, but something in the back of her mind told her she'd accepted it too readily. She tried to hand it back, but the girl shook her head.

"Keep it. It's my apology for using you to assuage my own guilt. Please, take it," said the girl, rubbing at her nose that was still red from crying, and then she was gone. Miyo clutched her new comb tightly, burning the image of the departing girl into her retinas, so that she would never forget this person who showed her such kindness…

Ah, so that's why I don't recognize her; Miyo mused.

"I've always dreamed of working in the city, though, unfortunately... But what can you do, you know? Anyway, that's why you don't have to worry about me at all. There, you're finished."

Carefully and thoroughly, the servant had applied a poultice to the injured arm and wrapped it neatly with bandages.

That alone was enough to suffuse her arm with a gentle warmth.

"Thank... Thank you," Miyo murmured.

"You're absolutely welcome," replied the girl, beaming at her.

Her smile was bright, beautiful; Miyo felt her own cheeks lift in response.

"But Miss Miyo, I have no right to your gratitude at all," confessed the girl.

"Why is that?"

"I haven't lifted a single finger for you in these past two months," she sighed, a shadow passing over her face. Shame and anguish clouded her expression as she hung her head low in remorse. "I had no idea I was such an awful person. I just... ignored all the abuse... And me helping you like this was all for my own selfish reasons, because I knew I couldn't go home with a clean conscience without doing anything. It was all just to make myself feel better..."

She bowed. "I'm so sorry."

At first, Miyo was not sure how to respond. But before she knew it, she was speaking. "I, um—"

"..."

"I was so...happy. I can't...express it very well, but even if it was for selfish reasons...that still doesn't erase the fact that...

Miyo had yet to inspect the injury herself, and it was much worse than she had imagined. A dark red bruise, terribly puffy and swollen, bloomed on her skin.

"This is horrible…and it looks so painful," the other girl murmured, making a face. "Wait right here, all right?"

She ran off and returned a bit later carrying a little box.

"Stay still."

The box housed medical supplies. The servant began treating Miyo's arm before she could say anything.

Miyo piped up hesitantly. "Um…"

"Yes?" said the girl without taking her eyes off her work, her face set in a serious expression.

"If they find you…they're going to be extremely cross with you."

"Is that so?" responded the girl in a blasé tone.

"…"

Her reply left Miyo floored.

The servants in the Saimori household rarely, if ever, associated with Miyo—they were terrified of Kanoko or Kaya punishing them if they were ever found out. They spoke to Miyo when their tasks called for it and they would set aside still usable hand-me-downs for her. But that was it.

No one stepped in to help when Miyo was beaten or rebuked, and no one treated her wounds. And Miyo never minded.

She could not bear the thought of someone getting caught in the cross fire because of her.

"I'm going to be quitting soon anyway," the girl said suddenly. Miyo listened. "I've only been working here for two months, but I received word that my mother hurt her back. She's out in the country. I need to look after my little brother and sister, and apparently someone in that village wants to marry me as well, so…I know it's time for me to go home."

"You sully this entire family! Put us out of our misery and just go away already!"

With her head to the ground, Miyo took every sharp lash of Kanoko's tongue.

She apologized until her stepmother was satisfied and then got up and left.

Her arm hurt. She no longer cried no matter what verbal abuse was flung at her, but her body never grew used to physical pain. It throbbed and ached. Tears welled up in her eyes.

Kanoko was right. It would be so much easier if she just died. But a wound like this was not enough to kill her. Miyo genuinely wished Kanoko had dealt a more fatal blow.

Even so, this wound was a nasty one. As the pain worsened, she began to feel faint.

I wish I would just die…

She collapsed near the servants' entrance at the far end of the manor. As a wave of wooziness hit her, she was on the verge of giving in and passing out when a voice said to her, "Miss Miyo? Are you all right?"

"Hmm?"

She wondered who on earth would ever speak to someone like her as she turned to find a young female servant standing there, one she was not very familiar with.

"What happened to your arm?" the servant asked, noticing Miyo cradling her injured arm with the unhurt one.

Miyo, however, could not say that her stepmother had done this to her, so she remained silent.

"Let me see," said the girl as she stepped right up to Miyo, pulled her arm out, and rucked up the sleeve of her kimono.

its teeth were missing. Despite that, she managed to use it to brush out her hair each day.

One morning, the comb—such as it was by that point—snapped right in half.

What am I going to do now?

Miyo was required to keep her hair respectable, which naturally necessitated a comb. Yet she did not have a coin to her name and would not be permitted to leave to buy one for herself anyway. That meant she would have to borrow one from one of the servants, but combs were not something people replaced on a regular basis. Would anyone even have a comb that they happened to be ready to throw away? She could not help but fret and worry over what to do.

Regardless, she could not be late for work. So she did what she could to rake her fingers through her hair and disguise its state by pulling it back and up. Fingers, however, could only do so much. She could feel the servants' stares, and her stepmother found fault with it as well.

"Goodness, what an eyesore. You cannot even groom yourself! You are an embarrassment," Kanoko chastised, throwing a heavy porcelain ornament at her.

To protect herself Miyo whipped her arms up, which throbbed with pain as the object made contact.

"Ngh—"

She could not voice her pain. Placing her hands on the floor, she bore through it as she bowed her head.

"My sincerest apologies."

"You are a truly wretched, disgusting, vulgar girl! You are nothing but a stain upon the Saimori name. I pray every day for your unceremonious death."

"My...deepest apologies."

Combs and Memories

by Akumi Agitogi

THAT night, Miyo sat before the dressing table in her room, staring down at the beautifully and intricately crafted comb resting in her palms.

It's gorgeous…

Fine, detailed flowers were carved into the boxwood comb; she delighted in the feel of her fingers gliding across the wood and the satisfying weight of it. Even for a mere comb, it had surely fetched a high price.

Miyo lifted her gaze from the comb and up to the dresser. Perched upon it was another comb, the one she had used for many, many years, whose multiple missing teeth made its age clear.

Slowly, she reached up and set her new comb beside it.

As she gazed at the pair of them by the light of the moon, her thoughts turned to the time when she still lived in the Saimori household.

It was around five or six years ago when her old comb broke.

As her stepmother Kanoko confiscated most of Miyo's belongings when she was a little girl, her daily effects at the time were things gifted to her by the servants. Despite how kind that sounded, everything she had gotten from them was so worn it would soon be no good at all anymore.

The comb she used back then was no exception. It was as though it had been fished out from the wastebasket—half of

NEXT VOLUME

I CAN'T HAVE YOU LEAVE.

BECAUSE I WANT TO FORMALLY MAKE YOU MY FIANCÉE.

Although this betrothal was never supposed to bring her happiness... could it?

My Happy Marriage

Continues in Volume 2

MY HAPPY MARRIAGE

MY HAPPY MARRIAGE

1

ORIGINAL CONCEPT
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